

## HABS/HAER

The following articles provide a sampling of the programs and documentation projects of the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record of the National Park Service. For more information about HABS/HAER, contact one of the authors or the editor of *CRM* (see page 2).

Monica P. Murphy

### One of a Kind The Records of HABS/HAER

**A**mong the most atypical preservation records in the world are those created by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service (NPS). HABS/HAER is unusual in that it creates two types of records. The primary records are the architectural and engineering documentation of historic structures and sites. Under a long standing agreement with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), these records are made available to the public through the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. The other important records are the office files and materials that document the activities of the office. These administrative records are unique and various. The NARA created a separate record group for them, Record Group 515, a very unusual procedure for a government organization of less than bureau level.

HABS/HAER is the oldest federally-funded preservation program in the United States. Established in 1933 as a Works Project Administration program under President Franklin Roosevelt, and codified by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, it has continued uninterrupted and remains true to its original mission to document the nation's architectural and engineering heritage. The work is carried out in cooperation with other federal agencies, state and local governments, private preservation and historical organizations, professional societies, and universities. HABS/HAER is internationally recognized for its rigorous recording standards, systematic approach to documenting historic structures and sites, and pioneering the most advanced documentation methodologies.

HABS/HAER produces full-size hand-measured and computer-generated drawings, some combining advanced photogrammetry techniques, large format black-and-white photographs and color transparencies, written historical and descriptive data, and original field notes on the historic structures and sites recorded. The documentation is organized according to established guidelines, is produced using archival

materials to ensure maximum life of the documentation, and is deposited in the Prints and Photographs Division in the Madison Building of the Library of Congress. Currently comprised of over 33,000 records, it is in many instances the only information remaining on a structure or site. All HABS/HAER materials are copyright free, reproducible, and readily available to the public.

Every government office has the same types of records—travel authorizations, personnel, correspondence—but some records are more valuable than others. In the HABS/HAER office, these records include correspondence and project files from the 1930s, the original signed 1969 Tripartite Agreement for the establishment of HAER, posters from the 1960s and '70s, original videos, films, photographs, and the HABS/HAER Collections database. Quite an unusual gathering of records, but to the researcher they all tell the story of HABS/HAER— who we are and the product we create.

Paradoxically for an historical organization, these important records were scattered throughout the office in numerous filing cabinets, some unlabeled and forgotten. Some records changed hands as the staff changed over the years, and others were filed in desks and cared for with the knowledge that they were important, but there was no place to put them for safekeeping. Other significant records took up valuable work space in the office. All of the records were valuable for the staff as well as for researchers, preservationists, and enthusiasts, but access to them was difficult. These records reveal HABS/HAER's unique history—how the idea for a national survey came to be, how it was organized, and how it functions within the federal government and with the many partnerships formed over the years with private organizations.

The establishment by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) of Record Group 515, Records of HABS/HAER, provided the program the impetus to restructure their records management program. Jerry Wallace, National Archives Liaison, Georgette Wilson, former HABS/HAER Collections Management Administrator, and Robert J. Kapsch, former chief of HABS/HAER, worked together to make sure permanently valuable records were preserved while they were still used and after they were transferred to the National Archives.

Mr. Wallace was responsible for conducting an annual review of the HAER records at the Library of Congress. He immediately recognized the importance and value of the collections as well as the program itself and set out to convince HABS/HAER that the National Archives is not the "black hole" of the government, and that the HABS/HAER administrative records needed to be organized and integrated at the National Archives. It was at this time that the

idea of a separate record group for HABS/HAER was introduced so that the consolidated records wouldn't get lost in the larger NPS Record Group 79.

When a group of NARA staff toured the HABS/HAER office in February 1992, literally dozens of filing drawers full of materials that could immediately be shipped to the National Archives as permanent records, and others which could be stored offsite, were discovered. In March 1992, a formal proposal was sent to the Action Archivist of the United States, Dr. Trudy Huskamp Peterson requesting a separate record group, largely due to the value of the records created and because of HABS/HAER's extensive involvement with private organizations. Dr. Peterson signed the proposal on July 1, 1992, creating Record Group 515, the Records of the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record. In a ceremony on October 8, 1992, Charles E. Peterson, founder of HABS, presented to the Archivist of the United States his original 1933 hand-written draft for the establishment of HABS as a WPA program.

After NARA staff reviewed the files in February 1992, HABS/HAER initiated the cataloguing, indexing, and transfer of permanent records to the NARA. Once RG 515 was created, the next step was to conduct an inventory of all the records in the office and to write a records disposition schedule. In preparation for the inventory, a HABS/HAER historian attended two classes taught by the NARA, "Records Disposition" and "Records Scheduling", and obtained a certificate of completion. The classes took one week, were very informative, and gave the participants a strong foundation to implement their records management programs. A wide array of similar programs are scheduled for 1997.

The inventory and eventual schedule were arranged according to the program's organization chart and the types of records each of the units within the office maintained. The inventory included writing a brief description of each type of subject file found, such as Project Leader files, or Peterson Prize files, and determining a disposition for the records — when the files could be closed, when they could be stored offsite, and when they could be transferred to the National Archives or destroyed. Although permanent official records must by law be transferred to NARA when no longer in regular use in a federal office, HABS/HAER still has access to them, and retains legal custody of the records in the Federal Records Center (FRC) until the records are formally transferred to NARA legal custody.

The inventory descriptions were really a draft of the final schedule. HABS/HAER worked closely with Larry Baume, a NARA appraisal archivist, to start the inventory project, determine dispositions, and write the schedule. Mr. Baume was patient with repetitive questions and frequent changes to the

records disposition schedule, and was understanding of the needs of the HABS/HAER staff. The final result was a comprehensive yet flexible description of all of HABS/HAER records. The schedule was approved and signed by John Carlin, Archivist of the United States, on August 20, 1996.

Now that a schedule has been approved, staff are more aware of the types of records kept and how they are organized and managed. HABS/HAER has also initiated new records management ideas. For example, a central file area has been established where files that are closed can be stored until they are sent to the FRC. This gives staff more filing space in their offices, keeps records of the same type in the one location grouped by year, and allows access to these files by anyone in the office. Most importantly, these records are preserved for future historians.

NPS programs should contact Warren Dade, NPS Records Officer, 202-523-5043, or the nearest regional FRC for training and other records management assistance. Those responsible for records management should consider taking the classes at the National Archives. They are extremely helpful and informative, and the NARA staff are knowledgeable, professional, and keep you interested. Take advantage of the resources available to you through the National Archives. An accurate schedule will increase effectiveness in records management, help free up additional office space, increase the likelihood that future scholars will write about your program—since the documentation will continue to exist, and encourage orderly files—leading to more effective and efficient records use by the staff. Help is available. All you have to do is call.

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Catherine C. Lavoie

## Southeastern Pennsylvania

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**T**he Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), the oldest preservation program of the National Park Service, produces archival documentation in the form of existing-condition measured drawings, large-format photography, and written history. These records support the ongoing preservation, maintenance, interpretation, and understanding of historic structures and sites, as well as their contextual landscapes.

Since 1994, HABS has been producing documentation of historic sites and structures in the five-